

March 15, 2018  
www.mbc.orgVol. 142  
No. 11

# THE Baptist Record

JOURNAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CONVENTION SINCE 1877

## BRIEFS

### CHRISTIAN GROUP READMITTED AT WSU

DETROIT (BP) — InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, expelled from Wayne State University (WSU) in Detroit for requiring chapter leaders to be Christian, has been readmitted but attorneys who filed a lawsuit on behalf of the group say the school's change of heart is hardly adequate. The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty said the school should also reimburse the nearly \$3,000 the group has paid in rental fees since losing its no-cost use of WCU facilities. "I'm sure that will be taken care of," WSU communications director Matt Lockwood told Baptist Press.

### GROUP SEND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM COORDINATOR

FALLS CHURCH, Va. (BP) — A coalition will urge the U.S. Congress to create a coordinator for religious freedom in Nigeria, as terrorism against Christians and other religious minorities intensifies in the African nation. The Global Coalition Working to Defeat Persecution and Violence in Nigeria decided to petition Congress after hosting a meeting with Nigerian governors and others on Feb. 27-28 at Baptist World Alliance headquarters in Falls Church, Va. Islamic extremists have killed an estimated 20,000 people and displaced two million others in Nigeria and its neighbors.

### BILLY GRAHAM HOLIDAY PETITION RISES TO 103,000

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (BP) — A petition to honor the late evangelist Billy Graham with a national holiday has nearly 103,000 signatures at [change.org](http://change.org). However, the road to a national holiday is steep. The creation of the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday in 1983 involved a 15-year journey, and although King was a pastor the day specifically recognizes his work in the civil rights movement, according to the 1999 Congressional report *Federal Holidays: Evolution and Application*. Of the 1,100 different national holiday proposals launched since 1870, only 11 have been successful, the report said.

## 15-week abortion limit headed to Governor Mississippi expected to pass most restrictive guidelines in nation

By William H. Perkins Jr.  
Editor

Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant is expected to sign a bill sent to his desk last week by the state legislature that will limit abortions to the first 15 weeks of gestation — the most restrictive guidelines in the nation. Abortion supporters immediately promised legal action if Bryant does so.

The House of Representatives approved House Bill (HB) 1510, titled the Gestational Age Act, by a 75-34 vote on March 8. Two days earlier, the Senate passed the bill 35-14.

Kenny Digby, executive director-treasurer of the Mississippi Christian Action Commission, told Baptist Press (BP) on March 9 that the Senate and House votes demonstrate the state is "concerned about babies who are totally unprotected, and I'm proud of our legislature for putting action to their words."

With enactment of the new ban, Mississippi "will be the vanguard at being pro-life," Digby noted. The Christian Action Commission is an agency of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.



BRYANT



GIPSON



CURRIE

"Many thanks to bill author Rep. Becky Currie and all House members supporting this legislation. It will protect women and will save the lives of many babies every year," said state Rep. Andy Gipson in a Facebook post.

Gipson, an attorney who represents District 77 in Rankin and Simpson counties, is pastor of Gum Springs Church in Braxton. He was the floor manager for debate on the bill.

Currie, a registered nurse from Brookhaven, represents District 92 in Copiah, Lawrence, and Lincoln counties. She is listed in House records as the principal author of HB 1510.

The bill garnered 14 sponsors in addition to Currie and Gipson. For a list of sponsors, visit [tinyurl.com/1510sponsors](http://tinyurl.com/1510sponsors).



To view how individual representatives voted on HB 1510, visit [tinyurl.com/1510housevote](http://tinyurl.com/1510housevote). To view how individual senators voted on HB 1510, visit [tinyurl.com/1510senatevote](http://tinyurl.com/1510senatevote).

Russell Moore, executive director of Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville and a Biloxi native, told BP on March 9, "I am thankful that Mississippi lawmakers have taken real steps to combat this industry of death and look forward to this bill being signed into law."

"My prayer is that Mississippi would continue to lead the way for other states in standing up for the unborn, women, and communities."

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Mississippi criticized passage of the bill and called on Bryant to issue a veto.

"It is not the legislature's job to interfere with a woman's decision about whether and when to become a parent," said ACLU

see LIMIT on p. 8

## Noms sought for 2019 MBCB posts

Jackson, MS (Special) — The 2018 Committee on Nominations approved by the messengers of the 182nd Mississippi Baptist Convention in October of last year will soon begin reviewing trustee/board member positions on the boards and commissions of the Mississippi Baptist Convention (MBC) to serve in 2019.

Robby Rikard, committee chairman and pastor of First Church, Wiggins, has said there are a limited number of vacancies to be filled on the following boards and commissions:

- Baptist Children's Village
- Baptist Memorial Health Care System, Inc. (Memphis)
- Board of Ministerial Education
- Education Commission

- Historical Commission
- Blue Mountain College
- Mississippi College
- William Carey University
- Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission, Inc.
- Mississippi Baptist Convention Board
- Mississippi Baptist Foundation

The Committee on Nominations will work with the heads of the institutions and agencies to bring a list of nominees to be approved by the messengers of the 183rd annual meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Convention on October 30-31, 2018, at First Church, Jackson.

For nomination forms, telephone Executive Administration (601) 292-3201 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 201. A nomination form can



also be downloaded by visiting [tinyurl.com/99nom](http://tinyurl.com/99nom) and scrolling to the bottom of the page.

Completed forms should be mailed to the Committee on Nominations, c/o Dr. Jim Futral, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530, at the above address to be received no later than May 1.

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## From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

### Wrestling with the truth

**M**ack Beygs, an 18-year-old senior at Euless Trinity High School outside Dallas, is a two-time state wrestling champion with a record of 32-0 this year. One would think that's not an easy feat, given the incredibly aggressive levels of competitiveness for which Texas high school sports programs are legendary.

"This year I wanted to prove a point that anyone can do anything," Mack told the Dallas Morning News Sports Day. "Even though I was put in this position, even though I didn't want to be put in this position, even though I wanted to wrestle the guys, I still had to wrestle the girls."

Yes, Mack was forced to wrestle in the Texas Girls 6A 110-pound division because the rules for high schools in Texas stipulate that athletes have to compete based on the gender listed on their birth certificates. Mack's birth certificate states that Mack is female, even though she is currently taking testosterone shots to "transition" to a male.

The potency of those steroid shots, along with the intense training required to be a top-flight wrestler, make it easy to believe he (she?) is male. She (he?) physically appears for all the world to be a young man in prime condition.

Which brings up a legitimate question that should have been obvious since the beginning of the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning) movement to gain legal and social legitimacy in this country: Is it fair for men to compete against women in venues that require overwhelmingly superior physical strength and endurance in order to prevail?

Put aside for a little while the arguments about social and intellectual capabilities (to name just two subjects) that can lead to some pretty nasty divisions between the sexes. In almost every area of human endeavor, males and females are so close in outcomes that it would be difficult for an impartial observer to define any differences. Some men find that hard to accept, but they need to get over it. It's true.

Sports is not one of those areas of equal outcomes. In the simplest terms — even after acknowledging

there are always going to be exceptions — it is simply not fair for physically-mature males to compete in female categories against females. That's why, virtually since the beginning of sports competitions, there have been separate divisions for men and women. The design of the quadrennial Olympic Games in this regard is the best testimonial to that reality.

In the collective and judicial wisdom of enlightened and secular America, however, people as young as six years of age can now decide in some parts of the country whether they are male or female or any one (or several) of the more than 20 genders now available for consideration. Don't believe that? Just spend a few minutes conducting some light research on the Internet and you'll know it's true.

So where does that leave Mack and the wrestling titles? She (he) has the biological and physical attributes of a woman, but he (she?) has declared himself (herself?) a man and proceeded by synthetic means to make that happen.

In which category does Mack fit? Virtually all high school females would be at a great disadvantage in the ring with Mack. If Mack is allowed to wrestle males, since his (her?) transition to maleness is incomplete and most likely always will be, her (his?) risk of serious injury increases exponentially.

Reasonable people realize those facts. That's why many female wrestlers forfeited their matches against Mack on the way up to the state title. The same reaction to Mack would probably be made if he was on the male side of the competition.

Here's a novel idea: Why don't we see what the Bible, the Word of God, has to impart about all the gender confusion so prevalent in our country today?

Well, God created us male and female and then immediately blessed us (Genesis 5:2). Man and woman were made exclusively for each other (Genesis 2:24). God gave instructions for husbands and wives on how to maintain a Christian household (Ephesians 5:21-33). These are just a few of the applicable Scriptures.

There. That should do it. Class dismissed.

## Scared to share?

**T**hough I have shared the Gospel message many times, I can still be afraid to share my faith with others. I'm pretty sure I'm not alone. I've heard many others express that same anxiety. Here are some reasons we might be afraid to share our faith and what to do about it.



### Guest opinion

with Doug Munton

#### Won't be well-received.

I've actually had very few people who were offended that I tried to share the Gospel with them. That doesn't mean they all trust the Lord when I witness. It just means that people are frequently more interested than you might think.

Often, I ask for permission to share the Gospel by saying something like, "Can I tell what the Bible says about how you can have a relationship with God?" or something like that. A few say "no" to that question, but many people are willing to at least hear the message.

#### Don't know it all.

It is true that we can't always answer all the questions people ask about faith. Sometimes we have to say, "I don't know," or "Let me find out more about that," but we don't have to know everything about everything to be able to share what we know.

All questions are not the same. Some questions people ask are more theoretical. Some are excuses. Some are genuine questions that need to be dealt with carefully. Often I find myself saying, "I don't know the answer to that fully and will need to get back with you on it, but can I tell you what the Bible says about how you can know Jesus?"

#### What will others think?

Let's face it. This one can be a big part of our fear of sharing the Gospel. Like many of you, I can be something of a people pleaser but God reminds us that He wants to use us to be His ambassadors. In other words, our primary thought should be on what He thinks

and not on what someone else thinks.

Remember that telling others is the natural result of what we believe. We should be kind and caring and loving in our sharing, but our primary focus should be on doing what the Lord wants us to do.

#### I might mess up.

I don't want to add confusion to those already living in spiritual confusion. This is one of the reasons why a sound method of sharing the Gospel is helpful and healthy. Learning a solid method can keep us on track and help us avoid confusing those who are hearing the Gospel.

There are dozens of great tools for sharing the Gospel in an understandable way. A solid methodology can help us overcome the fear of not knowing how to share.

If you have had any of these fears, or others, you are not alone but with God's help you can be a witness of God's grace to others. Don't let fear keep you from following the Lord's command to share the Gospel (Matt. 28:18-20). Don't let fear keep you from the joy of learning that God uses people like us to accomplish His purposes.

Munton, online at [dougmunton.com](http://dougmunton.com), is senior pastor of First Church in O'Fallon, IL, and a former first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention. His commentary appears courtesy of Baptist Press. Edited for style, clarity, and length.

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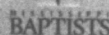
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VOLUME 142 • NUMBER 11 • ISSN 0005-5778  
Published weekly except weeks of July 4 and Christmas by the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, 515 Mississippi Street, Jackson, MS 39201. Subscription \$11.99 per year payable in advance. Economy plans available for cooperating Mississippi churches. Periodicals postage paid at Jackson, MS. Member, Association of State Baptist Papers. Deadlines: News items — one calendar week prior to requested publication date. Advertising — two calendar weeks prior to requested publication date. All submissions are subject to editing.



# Annie offering helps assemble unique church in Ga.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The Annie Armstrong Easter Offering provides support for missionaries who serve on behalf of Southern Baptists across North America. The 2018 giving goal is \$70 million. For more information, visit [anniearmstrong.com](http://anniearmstrong.com).

**CLARKSTON, Ga. (BP)** — More than 1,000 refugees come to Clarkston, Ga., each year. Send Relief missionaries Trent and Elizabeth DeLoach and the believers at Clarkston International Bible Church (CIBC) have made it their mission to help these men, women, and children feel not only welcome but at home in their new country.

A U.S. refugee resettlement program in the 1990s opened the door of opportunity for people from around the world to start a new life in Clarkston. This suburb of Atlanta eventually became known as "the most diverse square mile in America." More than 60 countries and 100-plus languages are represented, and the population continues to grow.

A place so rich in culture is exactly the kind of city the DeLoach family dreamed of finding. However, it was hard to believe such a place existed in North America, especially in Trent's home state of Georgia.

## Matters of state

Raised on a farm in southeast Georgia, Trent attended Toccoa Falls College, north of Atlanta. During his freshman year he met Elizabeth and they volunteered for a project with World Relief.

"It was my first exposure to working with refugees in the city of Atlanta," Trent said. "I didn't think much of it past that one opportunity."

Elizabeth, on the other hand, volunteered because she heard there would be Bosnian refugees there. Her love for missions started early, working alongside her father in relief efforts in Rwanda and Bosnia. "That's where my heart for a specific people group began," she said.

After they married, the DeLoaches moved to Kentucky to work with a church in Louisville. They were astonished that more than 5,000 Bosnian refugees lived in the area. They started "restaurant hopping" and praying for connections.

"The different cultures, religions, languages — it was all very intimidating," Trent said.

Over the course of two years, Elizabeth's influence and passion for those forcibly displaced from their homelands slowly affected her husband's heart. "It was really in Louisville, Ky., where our heart for refugees began to blossom and



**STEADY GROWTH** — Clarkston International Bible Church in the Clarkston suburb of Atlanta serves as a Christian hub for the burgeoning, multi-cultural refugee community in the area. The church is led by pastor Trent DeLoach with the able assistance of his wife Elizabeth. (BP photo courtesy of NAMB)



**TO THE NATIONS** — Trent DeLoach (seated at right end of pew) visits with children from many nations at the Clarkston International Bible Church in Clarkston, Ga. The church reportedly has been home to more than 40,000 refugees over the past 25 years. (BP photo courtesy of NAMB)

the burden went incredibly deep," Trent recalled.

"We started living life intentionally, you know, as missionaries to serve those who were new to our country. We had the opportunity to spend many years in Louisville trying to help the local church connect to the international community."

The DeLoach family returned to Georgia in 2015 to be part of CIBC. Formed in 2003 by combining three churches, CIBC originated as Clarkston Baptist Church in 1881. It also happens to be the same ministry where Trent and Elizabeth served during their freshman year of college.

Today, CIBC is a place where people from diverse backgrounds find common ground. A key player in the small community, CIBC hosts seven other churches and 12 community ministries reaching people with

the Good News of Jesus Christ.

In 2017, CIBC became a hub for the North American Mission Board's Send Relief compassion ministry and now hosts college interns.

"There are opportunities to minister every day," Trent said. There's recreation ministry that offers athletic activities for youth and adults. The job training and placement ministry helps residents build resumes, learn computer literacy, and discover opportunities for employment.

All the churches who share the meeting space engage in outreach and discipleship. Soon, a Swahili-speaking church will be added to the list which already includes Pakistani, Burmese, Nepali, and Sudanese churches.

## Power of perspective

Bill Perrin, an 85-year-old veteran, served as deacon at

"One of my dreams is for every Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist to have a Christian friend who can point them toward Christ. We share with our people a three-step process — Learn a name, make a friend, share Jesus." It's simple. That's our dream, and we see God bringing the nations to us."

**Trent DeLoach**

**Send Relief missionary,  
Clarkston International  
Bible Church,  
Clarkston, Georgia**

Clarkston Church and now serves as elder at CIBC. He has witnessed more than the changing of names. During the late 1990s, Perrin recalls "bad times" at Clarkston Church.

"People just started leaving for no reason. We had a 2.5 million-dollar budget and 200 to 300 in service on Sunday morning, but that just started vanishing. One night I said, 'Lord, I don't understand.'"

"Looking back, I know exactly why — because we had so much prejudice in the church at that time that we could have never had an international Bible church."

Perrin estimates there were 10-12 families remaining when a divinely inspired idea was born to combine churches that had different language needs. They settled on the CIBC name to make people from around the world feel welcome.

Perrin says a Sunday morning at CIBC now seems like a glimpse of what heaven will be. The current congregation is composed of one-third Americans, a term including both Anglos and African Americans; one-third Africans, primarily from Ethiopia, Sudan, Liberia, and Congo; and one-third Asians, former residents of Philippines, Burma, and Nepal).

## Faith in action

The DeLoach family and members of CIBC have found that sharing food is one of the most effective ways to connect, so church members provide a lunch for all first-time guests.

"There's never a shortage of interesting dishes in Clarkston," Trent said.

Also plentiful are children and teenagers in the area, Trent's and Elizabeth's four children among them. "My children are very active at CIBC and they love serving in simple ways," Trent said.

Recently, CIBC started hosting youth services and now young internationals are coming in droves. "We are seeing God do amazing things," Trent said. "Several from non-Christian backgrounds have started to see themselves as part of our family. Many are close to accepting Christ."

"The diversity of our community is what makes us unique. However, it also makes ministry difficult. We have people [in the area] from different religious backgrounds that include Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist. Most refugees have significant physical and emotional needs. They need Christian friends who can share the love of Jesus while helping them transition to life in America."

Elizabeth noted that by living next door to families with diverse cultural backgrounds, they have opportunities to influence the nations. "These people are still connected to home," she said, explaining that many are from remote villages that would be difficult for missionaries to access.

"You're able to make a wider impact as you reach these families," she pointed out.

"One of my dreams is for every Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist to have a Christian friend who can point them toward Christ," Trent said. "We share with our people a three-step process — Learn a name, make a friend, share Jesus." It's simple. That's our dream, and we see God bringing the nations to us."

Learn more about the DeLoach family at [anniearmstrong.com](http://anniearmstrong.com).

For some time now, I have heard from some of you asking if I was going to put together a book composed of the commentaries I have written through the years. These articles that appear in The Baptist Record each week are known as Directions, and occasionally some of you have requested they be sent to you or republished. I have been thinking about this book because of your interest.

The planned approach for putting the book together would be that it contain 366 of the Directions articles that have been written through the years. The book would be titled something like, Directions for Every Day, and it would include a day for Leap Year. If I'm going to accomplish that, I need your help. Soon I will pass the thousand mark of Directions being written for The Baptist Record, and I would love to have your help and input as to any of the articles that you have found helpful.

I realize some of the Directions articles are dated — or maybe better said, outdated — and some have only a passing relevance today. Other articles may have brought you a moment of inspiration of help or hope or maybe insight that has stayed with you. I would be blessed to hear from you. You will be a committee of editors.

Obviously, I did not set out to write a book but rather to just communicate



## Daily Directions

with my Mississippi Baptist family for a few minutes each week. The articles certainly have not been great works of literature but they are notes and reflections and thoughts on life and our world in real time with real people... you. If we can pull this off, Daily Devotions will be a book of 366 days. The pages will be each day's date, and hopefully it will be something for everyone over the year.

I remember the story of the old, rich Texas rancher who wanted to build a swimming pool at his palatial ranch

home. The contractor who came out to look at what he wanted was told that he actually wanted three swimming pools. When the contractor asked why, the rancher explained, "Well, I want one swimming pool that has warm water in it, another swimming pool that has cold water in it, and a third swimming pool that doesn't have any water in it. Baffled by what the rich man was telling him, the contractor couldn't help but ask, "Why would you want to build one pool and not even have water in it?" The rancher replied, "You don't understand.

Some of my friends like to swim in warm water. Some of them like to swim in cool water. Some of my friends don't like to swim." The rancher was going to satisfy everybody. In that light, I suppose you could say that if we can put this book together, I'll be trying to include something for the frequent reader, the occasional reader, and those of you who can't read.

Thank you so much for all of your kind words and thoughts and offerings and even differing views you have shared with me through the years about Directions. I'd be thankful for your reflections now. You can respond by e-mail, regular mail, or no mail. I'll get the message.

When you communicate, please let me know why something became special to you — a thought, a verse, an idea, a reflection — that the Lord at that point in your life was able to wrap around your heart and help you through the day. If it was special to you and you will share that with me, it will certainly be special to me. I will look forward to hearing from you. God bless you. Spring is on the horizon.

Feel free to send thoughts on one or more of your favorite articles to me via email at [directions@mibcb.org](mailto:directions@mibcb.org), or by regular mail at: Executive Administration, Attn: Directions, P. O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530.

## Unify for sake of Gospel, speakers tell MC audience

CLINTON, Miss. (BP and local reports) — Supernatural unity of the heart is the key to racial reconciliation, speakers said at a day-long event Feb. 27 at Mississippi College (MC) in Clinton, sponsored by MC and New Orleans Seminary (NOBTS).

As part of MC's annual Evangelism Lectures, NOBTS President Chuck Kelley and Ken Weathersby, vice president for convention advancement with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee in Nashville, spoke on unity for the sake of the Gospel in the morning chapel service.

Mississippi College is affiliated with the Mississippi Baptist Convention, while NOBTS is affiliated with the SBC.

Weathersby is a Jackson native who holds a B.A. degree from MC, a master of divinity degree from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and a doctor of ministry degree from Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson.

"We very naturally seek out people like us. Division, separation [are] natural. Community is supernatural. That is built by the Lord," Kelley said during a panel session with Weathersby.

Weathersby pointed out that even if a local church is not multi-ethnic, "the church of Jesus Christ is. We are to be making disciples among all ethnic groups. It doesn't matter what color they may be... God looks at the heart."

The lectures included a dinner the previous evening for alumni, donors, and students in conjunction with the 100th



**ALL ABOUT UNITY** — Ken Weathersby (right), vice president for convention advancement with the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee in Nashville, speaks during the Feb. 27 Evangelism Lectures at Mississippi College in Clinton while Chuck Kelley (left), president of New Orleans Seminary, looks on. Weathersby is a graduate of Mississippi College. (BP photo)

anniversary of NOBTS' founding. An afternoon panel discussion and breakout sessions with pastors from multi-ethnic congregations in New Orleans and NOBTS professors followed the morning dialogue.

Kelley challenged the audience not to make the mistake of overlooking the need for racial reconciliation even if they personally hold no grudge or anger against others.

"It isn't about that. It's about community," he explained. "The problem the Gospel came to address was the brokenness of the community of man, and to form out of all that broken-

ness a community of all of us, not just part of us."

Kelley said he learned after becoming NOBTS president that the seminary had founded a separate school for African Americans in the 1930s, furthering segregation. The action by NOBTS, which was known at the time as the Baptist Bible Institute, caused resentment and lasting "deep divisions," he said.

"That's when I understood that even though I wasn't mad at anybody and I didn't know anybody was mad at me, we did not have community in the body of Christ in New Orleans," Kelley said.

Though the decision to establish the separate school for African Americans was not of his doing, the responsibility to repair the damage was his, Kelley said.

"I'm happy to tell you the situation is much different now," Kelley said, "but it took work to rebuild that relationship."

Weathersby encouraged the audience to be intentional in reaching out to others whether they are of a different race or ethnicity, or from another country.

"We may discover that we have a lot of things in common, that we become friends," Weathersby said, "and becoming friends would demonstrate to the world that we are in Christ."

Differences between ethnic groups can resolve when believers stay focused on a common responsibility to evangelize and disciple, Weathersby said. "When we put our hands to the Gospel plow, the barriers break down. We must live in community together as we share Christ together."

Eric Pratt, MC vice president of Christian development and moderator of the morning panel, asked Kelley and Weathersby for tips on sharing the Gospel.

Weathersby said an easy first step is asking servers in restaurants if they have prayer concerns. Many share personal struggles, he said, such as a woman who recently said she was considering an abortion.

"Just by asking that one question... we're getting directly to the heart," Weathersby

said. "Prayer evangelism is a very strategic way of discovering needs in people's lives in order to bridge that gap in sharing the ultimate need, and that is the Savior."

Kelley told of a hotel worker who, after overhearing his phone conversation with his wife Rhonda, shared with him about a loss in her own life. A Gospel conversation followed.

"Introduce Jesus into a conversation and see what God does," Kelley said. "You'll often be surprised at the kind of Gospel conversations you can have if you just give Jesus an introduction."

The afternoon panel discussion and breakout sessions continued the focus on racial reconciliation.

Ryan Rice, pastor of Connect Church in New Orleans, pointed to the challenge he faces as an African American pastor leading a racially diverse congregation. Learning to yield to others' preferences and viewpoints is a matter of discipleship, he said.

"Your preferences don't matter to Jesus, so that means your pastor's level of melanin [skin pigment] shouldn't matter either," Rice said. "We die to our own preferences for the glory of the Gospel."

Josh Holland, a white pastor who shares pastoral leadership with two African American pastors, said, "If we truly believe at the cross there's [level] ground, then... we have to sit at the table together. Everybody's going to have to eat some humble pie and be able to give grace to each other."



# God turns violent teenager into faithful follower, leader

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The Annie Armstrong Easter Offering provides support for missionaries who serve on behalf of Southern Baptists across North America. The 2018 giving goal is \$70 million. For more information, visit [anniearmstrong.com](http://anniearmstrong.com).

**TORONTO, Ontario, Canada (BP)** — "Everyone is welcome!" That's the motto of Fellowship Church Rouge Park located in Toronto's East End.

The multiethnic, multigenerational church plant rents space in a local Catholic school on Sunday mornings and hosts events throughout the week. Strategically launched near an area known for gang violence, the ministry is led by church planting missionary and a former gang member Kesavan Balasingham and his wife Viji, both immigrants to Canada who found new life here.

Known as the most multiethnic city in the world, Toronto's metropolitan area has a population of nearly six million people.

"More than half of the people here were born outside the country," Kesavan said. "An estimated four percent of the population is evangelical Christian. We thank God the world is here, but the multicultural nature brings a lot of confusion. So, clarity of the Gospel is a major need."

"We believe that this is the harvest where God wants us to work, to pray, to labor, and to see people who don't know Jesus becoming worshippers of Christ, and then they themselves reach out to others. That's our prayer, our dream."

## Pursuit of freedom

Originally from Sri Lanka, Kesavan was raised Hindu and lived in several countries before his family moved to Canada. Differences in background, culture, and religion caused great divides in the community. At the age of 19, he was arrested for gang violence. "While in prison, I got to read the Bible for the first time and came to understand the Gospel as the Good News," he recalled.

Darryl McCullough, a volunteer from a local prison ministry, met weekly with Kesavan and became a trusted mentor to the young Christian.

"I believe that anybody can be redeemed," said McCullough in a television interview about his work in the prison system. "I believe the question needs to be asked, 'Why does somebody get to where they are,' and then start working on that premise rather than throw them away."

"I believe most guys in prison are going to get out sometime."

"We believe that this is the harvest where God wants us to work, to pray, to labor, and to see people who don't know Jesus becoming worshippers of Christ, and then they themselves reach out to others. That's our prayer, our dream."

**Kesavan Balasingham**

**Send Relief missionary, Fellowship Rouge Park, Toronto, Canada**

How do we want them out?"

Kesavan grew in faith through discipleship with men like McCullough. He found freedom in Christ during his incarceration and discovered a heart to help others do the same. He studied the Bible with fervor and took college courses to become a counselor.

"The Lord saved me very early on in my journey in prison," Kesavan said. "I kept reading through the Bible and I came to read the story of Joseph, a young man who ran away from sin, and then afterward, the story of Moses, a man who ran into sin. I saw how God still used him."

"Then I saw the story of David and most importantly, in the New Testament the story of Saul who became Paul, how God used [him]."

Kesavan pauses and laughs. "Um, violent people for His good glory. I began to have hope that God can most certainly use my life, in whatever way it pleases Him."

After his release, Kesavan continued his studies and graduated from seminary. During this season, God brought Viji back into his life. Though she, too, was from Sri Lanka, they met in Toronto while at school.

The two eventually were engaged and married. Together, they made the move into full-time ministry.

After two and a half years pastoring at a community church in Toronto, Kesavan felt called to return to the same area where he was once a troubled youth to plant Fellowship Church Rouge Park (FCRP), which initially began in his living room.

The goal: to minister to internationals dealing with challenges like the ones he and his family had faced.

## Reaching out

FCRP hosts open gym and field nights for area youth to play

and connect. For Kesavan, this ministry opportunity is close to his heart as it targets young men who are in similar situations to his own as a teenager.

Shooting hoops and praying together has built trust as well as community, and in the summer of 2016 two young men were saved and baptized.

"Both are being discipled and growing," Kesavan said. "They are now co-leading our young men's sports outreach every week. They have anywhere from 20-30 young people showing up and hearing the Gospel. Both know the value of having Gospel conversations with these young men and follow up with them from week to week."

"It's a joy to see fruit in their lives and our local church being blessed by their service. This week, I took both of them to a three-day workshop on biblical exposition so that they would learn important principles on faithfully teaching God's Word to others."

At FCRP, relational ministry is a core value. Every other week, they host "Eat, Serve, Love." Members and guests sit around a table, share a meal, and work on building community and growing spiritually. A babysitter and a place to connect is provided.

Their desire: "Everyone is welcome but especially those who don't have a community of their own."

One member has an interesting connection. Gajan Raveendran and Kesavan Balasingham were members of rival gangs and, therefore, sworn enemies during their teenage years. "I was in and out of jail all the time, in and out, in and out," Raveendran said.

After nearly a decade of recurring prison terms, he decided in 2010 that he wanted a different kind of life. He approached a friend who was a Christian and that friend said he knew someone who could relate and may be of help. When Raveendran asked what the guy's name was, his friend replied, "Kesavan."

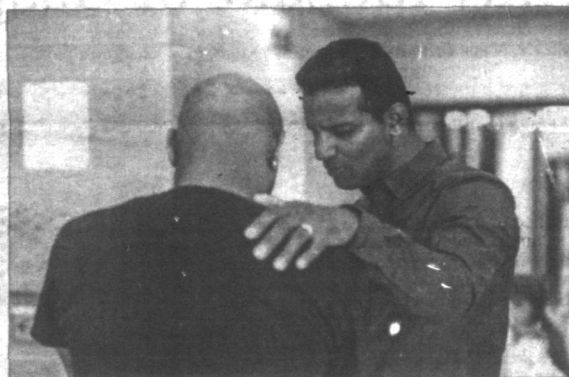
Raveendran called Kesavan and a friendship formed. He could see the difference in his former enemy.

"When you talk to him, he doesn't raise his tone; he doesn't curse," Raveendran said. "He is always quoting Scripture. Whenever I tell him I want to be like him, he says, 'No, you want to be like Christ.'"

Like many of the immigrants in the area, Raveendran has spent most of his life between cultures, trying to find a place to belong. "The devil always brings up the past to make you feel like you can't — makes you feel worthless," he said.



**HOW TO DO IT** — Kesavan Balasingham (right) has led events with his church all over town aimed at reaching the lost and making disciples of others. The former gang member and his wife Viji are North American Mission Board church planting missionaries. (BP photos courtesy of NAMB)



**FELLOWSHIP OF PRAYER** — Kesavan Balasingham (right), a North American Mission Board church planting missionary, prays with a man attending Balasingham's church plant, Fellowship Church Rouge Park in Toronto's East End in Canada.

However, Raveendran has seen firsthand how God can change a person for the better.

Raveendran attends church because he says he likes a lot of the things about Christianity, and he likes the way Christians treat one another. Going to FCRP helps him remember he is not alone.

"I've lived my entire life doing my own thing, so it's sort of like hard for me to just give that up, and then give it all to God," he noted, "but eventually one day, I do want to just give to God and just live my life freely, you know?"

Kesavan's new church plant is greatly needed in Toronto. As the city's multiethnic population grows, so does the spiritual darkness. The urban landscape can

be a concrete jungle for many residents, especially immigrants in search of a new home.

FCRP wants to meet these physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Kesavan and Viji consistently pray for God's guidance, and that more will join them in expanding the church's reach.

"We want to keep going into the harvest and never settle," Kesavan said. "We have the world living around us and they have their religions with them. Our aim is to point toward the Gospel by proclaiming and demonstrating its power in our lives by the way we engage the community."

Learn more about the Balasinghams at [AnnieArmstrong.com](http://AnnieArmstrong.com).

## Just for the Record



The youth of **NEW LIBERTY CHURCH, MORTON**, attended D-Now weekend in January at Timbercreek Resort, Pulaski.



**WOODLAND CHURCH, PONTOTOC**, ordained Ronald Stegall as deacon Mar. 4. He is shown with his wife Pat and pastor Justin Varnon.



**CENTERPOINT CHURCH, BROOKHAVEN**, baptized nine people Jan. 21. Steve Herron, youth/children's pastor, is shown with arms raised.



The senior adults of **SILVER CREEK CHURCH, MCCOMB**, toured the Armed Services Museum/Camp Shelby, Hattiesburg, Mar. 2. Donnie Coker, pastor.



Members of **CENTRAL CHURCH, MEKIDIAN**, had a Dream Night service Mar. 4. They examined the current reality and future state of the church with a realistic look at the obstacles. Over 75 obtainable dreams were revealed. Shown are Liz Cain, Marcia Everett, Danny Palmer, and Ruby Palmer. Glenn Jackson, pastor.



**MEADOWVIEW CHURCH, STARKVILLE**, recently held a deacon ordination service for Bill Trainor. Trainor and his wife Andrea are second and third from left, front row.

### In other Church News:

► **Wheeler Grove Church, Wheeler Grove**, will host a Prophecy Conference March 22-23 featuring Robert Jeffress, senior pastor of First Church, Dallas, and commentator on Fox News cable television network, along with The Lovelace Family southern Gospel singers of Burnsville. There are no

fees or charges for attending. For more information and to register, visit [wheelergrovebaptist.com](http://wheelergrovebaptist.com). Kara Blackard, pastor.

► **Holly Church, Alcorn**, will be hosting a Sportsman's Banquet Wildgame Supper Mar. 24. Brad Clay, founder of Final Descent Outdoors, guest speaker. Free. Registration requested at [www.hollybaptist.org](http://www.hollybaptist.org) or call (662) 286-3474.

## BIBL i O C I P H E R

TZO VR ZKW FKZJKQPRO WK WXDN  
GKQSO: VAW VR HR WQTZNJKQPRO VH  
WXR QRZRGDZB KJ HKAQ PDZO, WXTW  
HR PTH IQKCR GXTW DN WXTW BKCO,  
TZO TFFRIWTVSR, TZO IRQJRFW, GDSS  
KJ BKO.

QKPTZN WGRSCR: WGG

Clue: C = V

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Hebrews 5:5

By Charles Marx, 1932-2004, © 2005

2 CORINTHIANS 3:2-5

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## College News



Scott Dunaway is the latest recipient of the Byrd Memorial Preaching Award at **MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE**. He is a 21-year-old senior from Ocean Springs and will preach to his fellow students at the March 20 chapel at First Church, Clinton, at 10:50 a.m. The award goes to an MC undergraduate on the Clinton campus preparing to go into a Christian ministry. It includes a certificate and a \$500 cash award.



### EVANGELIST CHRIS BROADHEAD

601.550.9565  
chrisbroadhead5714@gmail.com

Evangelist Chris Broadhead is available for revivals, pulpit supply, or in any direction in which the Lord may lead. Bro. Broadhead is an evangelist who is committed to traditional, Holy Ghost, Bible based preaching and the conservative views of the Baptist doctrine. Bro. Broadhead is a member of Magnolia Baptist Church and is pursuing his degree in church ministries. He is married and resides in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. He can be contacted by phone, text, or email at: 601.550.9565 or Chrisbroadhead5714@gmail.com

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March 19: 15th Avenue Baptist Church, Meridian  
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# Getting priorities in order leads to effective ministry

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The Annie Armstrong Easter Offering provides support for missionaries who serve on behalf of Southern Baptists across North America. The 2018 giving goal is \$70 million. For more information, visit [anniearmstrong.com](http://anniearmstrong.com).

**LAS VEGAS (BP)** — Established in 1905 near the Union Pacific Railroad tracks, the city that was once a tiny pass-through in the Mojave Desert has become one of the world's most popular tourist destinations.

Las Vegas hosts more than 42 million visitors each year. The draw includes novelty resorts and casinos with enough lasers and neon lights to make it visible from space, earning NASA's distinction for Brightest Spot on Earth.

Spiritually, however, the statistics tell a different story.

The resident population of Las Vegas is estimated to be around 630,000 people. Of that number, 92% reportedly do not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Less than 37% of residents identify as religious. Less than five percent align with the Protestant faith.

The numbers underscore the reputation by which this place is known — "Sin City" — but a new church plant is at work to bring transformation.

Leading the way are Las Vegas natives Heiden and Neena Ratner and the team at WALK Church. Their mission is to free people to walk in Jesus.

### Letting go of idols

While growing up, Heiden's dreams consisted mostly of playing Division 1 college basketball. As a sophomore in high school, he was selected as the Gatorade Player of the Year for Nevada and consistently made all-state teams.

He went on to play as a guard for James Madison University (JMU) in Harrisonburg, Va., and it was there that some teammates invited him to a Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) meeting.

Everything changed. "It was during that time that I realized I was missing something," he said. "I thought, these people have something I don't. I was able to hear the Gospel, get myself a Bible for the first time, ask questions, and it was there that God really began to draw me to Himself."

Heiden became a believer in Christ, and while getting to know Jesus he began to develop a passion for teaching, preaching, and sharing the Gospel. The journey led him back to his hometown.

The thing that was crazy was, all I knew back in Las Vegas were people who didn't go to church or didn't have a relationship with Jesus, so when I came back home that summer I just decided that, you know what, I know enough



**SEEKING THE LOST** — Heiden Ratner has a vision to combine his love and professional career in sports with his passion to share the Gospel in Las Vegas, Nv. (BP photo courtesy of NAMB)

that I can maybe start a small group Bible study.

"I'd never been to church in Las Vegas in my life and so I just decided to hit people up that I knew."

Neena, whom he had known in high school, was among those he called to attend the study. "That's where we connected again, and I saw something change in her life as well as mine," Heiden said. Their friendship grew, as did their respective relationships with the Lord.

When he returned to JMU for another semester, his love for basketball was still present but not the same. He explained that most of his life the game and the fame had been an idol — "a little 'g' god," — but now as a follower of Christ he realized that the game was not a god but a blessing from God.

"I'm living out the dream that I always had of being on TV and playing at this high level," he said. "While at JMU, God drew me to Himself, and He allowed me to then continue to use the game as a platform for His glory and that took me to Israel where I was playing professionally."

While in Israel, he married Neena. The season was a sweet one but seeds that had been planted years before were starting to take root. The Ratners eventually returned to Las Vegas, where Heiden continued leading Bible studies for friends and former teammates.

"I really sensed God placing His finger on my heart, saying, 'I'm calling you to something different. I'm calling you to something bigger, where basketball's still going to be a part of it, but it's going to look more like full-time ministry. It's going to look more like a church plant in the city.'"

### Forward motion

Ratner began studying as a church planting apprentice at

his home church, Hope Church, and then began forming a launch team that included people from around the city. They circled a launch date on the calendar and met often to study the Bible, pray and plan.

"I love this city," Heiden said. "I love the people in this city. I love the lights in this city. I love the noise but more than anything, I love what God is doing in this city."

Rooted in Colossians 2:6, the name WALK Church points to the foundational directive to walk in the ways of Christ. "Our church publicly launched on Sept. 20, 2015, out of the middle school I went to growing up," he said.

The number of believers who gather in the school cafeteria on Sunday is growing, currently averaging around 180-200 each week, and WALK Church does more at Schofield Middle School than simply lease space. The church members have turned it into a community by hosting cookouts, tackling improvement projects, and starting a food pantry.

Heiden's love for basketball plays a large part in his ministry. WALK Hoops draws a crowd of players, and some of them join Heiden in a competitive league at the Tarkanian Basketball Academy.

WALK Church is all about getting out into the city. Their small groups are dubbed "Charge Groups," and they meet in homes around Las Vegas throughout the week. People are charged to get involved in the areas about which they are passionate.

Every move the Ratners and WALK Church make is about expanding the Gospel into the "Sin City" of Las Vegas. They want to plant more churches in the city, meet more needs, and give lost, hopeless people a place to find support.

Learn more about the Ratners at [anniearmstrong.com](http://anniearmstrong.com).

# NYC neighborhood is changed by missionary couple's loyalty

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The Annie Armstrong Easter Offering provides support for missionaries who serve on behalf of Southern Baptists across North America. The 2018 giving goal is \$70 million. For more information, visit [anniearmstrong.com](http://anniearmstrong.com).

**NEW YORK CITY, New York** — Once an abandoned storefront tagged with spray paint, the building that originally housed Graffiti Church has become a symbol of hope on New York's Lower East Side.

Send Relief missionaries Taylor Field and wife Susan strategically positioned the church plant in 1986 amid crack houses and a large homeless population, eventually making this neglected neighborhood their home.

"Jesus started with meeting needs first," Field said. "His compassion grew people's faith, and then He built the church on that faith."

The Fields' work was not without opposition. Confronting drug dealers and learning how to care for users and hundreds of homeless men, women, and children were part of the weekly challenges.

"The first college mission group would paint our storefront, and then someone would tag it again with graffiti," Field said. The mission team then painted their own spiritual message on the wall along with the word, "Graffiti."

Inspiration struck.

The ministry workers decided to embrace the form of artistry so familiar to the neighborhood, and gave what was then East 7th Baptist Ministry a new moniker: Graffiti, which eventually became a church.

Embedded in the identity of the church is a simple idea: "From small things come great things." Field explained that it is all about an upside-down approach to ministry doing tangible, practical things well. Stories of life change testify to the effectiveness.

## Practical approach

Recently released from prison and living in a treatment facility for drug rehabilitation, Raul received a court mandate to take a GED class. Graffiti offered one. Raul was skeptical about going to a church even for a required education class, but he went anyway.

One day after class, a member of the church extended an invitation to visit a service saying, "We would love to have you." "Something about the 'we' stood out to Raul, and he came six months in a row."

He also brought his girlfriend Siyida. Leaders in the church helped mentor Raul and Siyida. They became followers of Christ, and after more than two and a half years of dating, they decided to get married.

Now they attend and serve at Graffiti campuses, which have grown to five meeting sites in the New York City metro area and two affiliates in other cities.

The small-things approach works. Change continues on the Lower East Side through daily connections in the diverse community. The church shares Christ's compassion in practical ways — from after-school tutoring and ESL classes to hip-hop dancing and lunches in the park.

"When we serve a meal, it's not just about handing over some food. We sit down together at the table and talk while we eat," Field said. "It's about connecting."

Many who call Graffiti their home church have been directly impacted by the church's ministry efforts: a free sandwich, a literacy lesson, legal assistance, a blanket in the New York winter.

Louis "Chess Monster" Taylor is part of that group. "I was homeless for about 60 years," said the former history teacher who moved to New York about 15 years ago. Every day, he played chess at Tompkins Square Park and through that consistency, he became well known in the neighborhood.

When one of the Fields' young sons expressed interest in learning chess around the age of nine, a game with Chess Monster was a must. That was the beginning of a relationship that continues to this day. The Field family invited Chess Monster to lunch at the park.



**DEDICATED TO NEIGHBORHOOD** — Taylor Field and his wife Susan have served the people of New York City since 1986 when they planted Graffiti Church. (BP photo courtesy of NAMB)

"I noticed when he [Field] started feeding the people in the park — no strings attached," the chess expert said. "Other ministers came through the park, and you had to listen to the hour and a half sermon first. Then you might get a bag or a ticket for the pantry."

"Well, Taylor was the complete opposite. He fed everybody first and if you wanted to stay, you could stay. If you didn't want to stay, you could go. So, that really impressed me."

Over the course of a few years, Chess Monster went from receiving free lunches to helping serve meals to others. He connected with people at Graffiti and experienced something new. He noted when you're in need of food or shelter and someone reaches out to help, it makes a big impact. "There's this old saying: An empty stomach has no ears," he said.

Graffiti's approach to meet the need first made it possible for Chess Monster and people in similar situations to hear about the love that motivated their efforts.

Louis Taylor now has a personal relationship with Jesus. He works at the church in maintenance, helps lead Bible studies, and continues to be part of the compassion ministries that changed his life.

## The long game

Through consistency and authentic love, the hope of Christ has infiltrated the Lower East Side and surrounding communities. Graffiti continues to pioneer ways to serve the neighborhoods of their respective campuses and they keep in mind the larger goal: to share the Good News across the globe.

"Graffiti values a heart for God and hands for work," Field said. "We have more than 20 ministries and have assisted in some way in helping start 31 new church plants which in turn have started 39 more."

"There's a famous game in chess, as I understand from chess experts, where one player continues to give, and give, and give some of their most valuable pieces," Field said. As it plays out, you may look like you're losing, but it's a strategy because it's a strategy for the long game. In the end, you're really winning. I think that's part of the story of the Gospel."

That long-game vision and willingness to invest time and resources have helped transform this area over the past few decades. Change has not come quickly, but it has come.

"Changing one block can change a neighborhood, changing a neighborhood can change a city, changing a city can change a country, changing a country can impact the whole world," Field said.

Learn more about the Fields at [anniearmstrong.com](http://anniearmstrong.com).

## LIMIT

cont. from p. 1

of Mississippi executive director Jennifer Riley-Collins in a press release dated the day after the Senate passed the bill. "Their job is to promote people's health and well-being, not restrict access and cause additional burdens upon the state."

In threatening a federal lawsuit if Bryant signs the bill into law, Riley-Collins said, "We cannot allow those who want to put abortion completely out of reach to pass another law that stands in the way of women and the care they need."

Diane Derzis, who owns the only remaining abortion clinic in Mis-



**RILEY-COLLINS**



**MOORE**



**DERZIS**

issippi — the Jackson Women's Health Organization on North State Street in Jackson — contended in late January as HB 1510 was winding its way through the legislative process that lawmakers' intent all along was to spark a test case in federal court.

"I think the bill is clearly unconstitutional," Derzis said, according to WREG-TV in Memphis. "I think that's part of the plan, to get as much anti-abortion legislation headed up through the court system, hoping by the time it gets there, there's another anti-choice justice."

Editor's note: Baptist Press contributed to this article.

## Revivals & Homecomings

► **Trinity Church, Pearl:** Homecoming, Mar. 18; revival, Mar. 19 — 21, 7 p.m. nightly. Dan Pardue, revival speaker.  
► **Unity Church, Moselle:** Revival, Mar. 18 — 21; Jim

Futral, speaker.  
► **Holly Springs Church, Brookhaven:** Homecoming, Mar. 18; Sunday School, 10 a.m., followed by business meeting, music by Revelation, and covered dish lunch.

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Prophecy Conference  
At  
Wheeler Grove Baptist Church  
March 22-23  
With  
Dr. Robert Jeffress,  
Pastor of First Baptist Church Dallas, TX



Thursday, March 22:  
Evening meal-6pm  
Lovelace Family singing-6:45  
Message "Not Left Behind" by Dr. Jeffress-7pm  
Break-7:45pm  
Message "Rewards In Heaven" by Dr. Jeffress-8pm  
Dismissal-9pm

Friday, March 23:  
Breakfast-9am  
Message "How Can I Prepare For My Journey To Heaven?" by Dr. Jeffress-10am  
Dismissal-11am

There is no registration fee or any other charge for this conference.  
If you would like to register online, please go to [www.wheelergrovebaptist.com](http://www.wheelergrovebaptist.com).

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The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published.

Preferred method: news may be submitted electronically to the e-mail address below, and must be included in the message segment of an e-mail form. Secondary method: news may be typewritten or neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and mailed. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone. Due to ever-present virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments in JPEG format are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs must be submitted electronically via e-mail, as attachments in JPEG format. **Hard copy photographs mailed through the postal service will not be accepted.** Photographs must be clear, sharp, and well-lit. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. Photographs containing inappropriate gestures and objectionable clothing will not be published. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items that do not reproduce well on newsprint are generally not publishable.

There is no guarantee that news items and/or photographs will be published, and unsolicited material will not be acknowledged or returned. All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date. Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive.

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# Missionaries hear distinct call back home to Michigan

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The Annie Armstrong Easter Offering provides support for missionaries who serve on behalf of Southern Baptists across North America. The 2018 giving goal is \$70 million. For more information, visit [anniearmstrong.com](http://anniearmstrong.com).

**DETROIT, Mich. (BP)** — Known as the headquarters for the big three American automakers, Detroit through the years has experienced prosperity, population explosion, and most recently overwhelming urban decay.

From financial crisis, to automotive industry cuts, to clean water issues, Detroit's struggle has affected the entire metro population of more than four million people. Violent crimes rank among the highest in the nation. Less than 10% of eighth graders in the inner city are proficient in reading.

This is a city of hurting people who need hope. Yet, only about 43% identify as religious, according to World Population data. Of that number, Catholicism ranks the highest at about 17%.

As church planting missionaries, Travis and Jennifer Whittaker want to see Christ bring lasting hope to the metro area by transforming people who will then transform their city. The Whittakers chose a name for their new church inspired by a different side of the city's heritage — the grid system with roads placed one mile apart.

In September 2015, Mile City Church held its first service.

## Helping people

Every week, Mile City Church meets in the Detroit suburb of Livonia on the campus of School-

craft College about 15 miles from the downtown area. "We value helping, we value people, and we value helping people move forward," Travis said.

As a church in rented space, each Sunday begins early with a flurry of volunteers setting up signage, nursery space, children's ministry equipment, and turning a conference center into a vibrant and welcoming worship center.

The church seeks to provide a message that is relevant and approachable. Travis utilizes a range of visual aids from banners and sermon monitors displaying Scriptures to leaking soda bottles that demonstrate a sermon point about how easy it is for vision to slip away.

Families are drawn to the hospitality and children's ministry with people of all ages responding to the Gospel message.

An online "first-time visitor" video gives guests a brief tour before they ever set foot on the property. When they do arrive they're greeted with a smile, a handshake, and free coffee. The idea: Make everyone feel welcome.

Utilizing the Starting Point series, Travis teaches the foundations of faith and throughout the week, small groups called city groups meet all over metro Detroit.

Brenda was one of those people seeking hope. After her husband moved out and her parents passed away, she was looking for something to hold on to. Her children started going to Mile City Church, and she decided to go with them.

"It was so warm and welcoming," she said. They all attended the Starting Point group together. "It was an awakening. I could breathe. I found out that no mat-

ter where I go or what I do, Christ was there to rescue me."

Travis baptized Brenda, and her story is one of many lives changed and celebrated. Smiling and dripping with water from the portable baptismal pool, this reality is something Travis doesn't take for granted. It's his calling coming true, one that was born years ago on a pumpkin farm down the road.

## Homegrown heritage

Travis grew up working in the family farming business just outside the city. His grandfather was a barber, who became a pastor later in life. He became a believer at an early age. After college, he struck out on his own as a musician, letting the chords and lyrics testify to his faith.

That is, until God called him to do more.

While visiting his family, Travis sat in the old barber chair that once belonged to his grandfather and everything changed. "I never wanted to church plant," he said. "I wanted to keep singing for Jesus instead of teaching due to my stuttering problem, but I heard the call of God challenge me to lead in a new way that day, and I knew I had to do it."

When the Whittakers took the leap of faith to plant Mile City Church, they felt called to locate near the farm. "I had to let His voice be the loudest," Travis said. Now at the end of every service, the church planter who never wanted to speak publicly challenges his congregation with a visual reminder. "When you see a mile sign, pray for the Mile City."

Learn more about the Whittakers at [anniearmstrong.com](http://anniearmstrong.com).

## Truth is not relative.

Find it in the One who is the way, truth, and life.

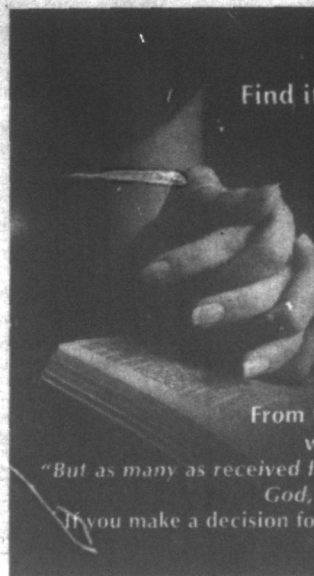
Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life.

From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.



# THE VILLAGE VIEW



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## GIFTS OF HONOR AND MEMORY

A portion of The Village View is allocated each month to a list of Gifts of Honor and Memory. Many groups and individuals elect to pay tribute to others through this sensitive, meaningful, and helpful medium. This feature is hopefully designed to further honor, with taste and respect, those who are and have been special to our special friends.

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## BCV EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

The BCV employs Christian, mission-minded, husband and wife teams, without dependent children or pets, to serve in the position of Houseparents. The couples must be mature Christian adults with personal integrity, character and of good reputation with standards and ethics expected of any member of The Baptist Children's Village staff.

They receive a salary with benefits and are provided a private bedroom and meals while on duty. The primary job responsibility of Houseparents is to maintain a home-like environment that models healthy, Christian family living for children and youth residents. They are the primary caregivers and help with everything from transportation and homework to laundry and meals when on duty.

Houseparent responsibilities are varied and somewhat dependent upon which campus and to which cottage the couple is assigned. However, all Houseparents need to be in good physical, mental and emotional health. They must be cooperative and comfortable working in a team environment.

To apply for the current Houseparent openings, please contact Celeste Cade at [ccade@baptistchildrensvillage.com](mailto:ccade@baptistchildrensvillage.com) or 601-922-2242.

A complete job description and application may be downloaded at [www.baptistchildrensvillage.com](http://www.baptistchildrensvillage.com).



## Keeping Commitments • 1 Corinthians 7:1-13

Does your local newspaper carry a "Dear Abby" column? Ours does, and when scanning the paper for articles of interest, I'll often give it a brief read. Sometimes the questions are heart-wrenching and desperate; at other times, they seem ridiculous. Likewise, the responses from this advice icon range from compassionate to caustic. Often, I agree with the answers, but at other times, my Christian worldview sees things differently.

We all need someone to lend an ear to our questions on occasion. Just voicing our concerns can sometimes clarify a course of action. Often, "two heads are better than one", allowing us to see an unconsidered perspective and possible solution. In today's lesson, Paul takes on the role of a spiritually-minded Dear Abby.

The Corinthian believers had obviously written their mentor a detailed letter seeking his opinion and advice on several matters. He starts his response in 1 Corinthians 7 by tackling some thorny issues about marriage commitments, divorce, singleness, sexual temptation and fidelity. Although our focal passage encompasses only verses 1-13, examining the whole chapter and other related Scriptures will be helpful.

Paul begins his focus in a seemingly-strange way: "It is good for a man not to marry" (vs. 1 NIV). That may be a head-scratcher for those who recall

God's comment in Genesis 2:18: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him". So how do we correlate these two contrasting views? Paul's perspective was tempered by the difficult times in which they lived, calling them "the present crisis" (vs. 26), and saying "the time is short" (vs. 29). Thus, being single allowed one to live "in undivided devotion to the Lord" (vs. 35).

Paul, however, realized the strong pull of sexual attraction and resulting

temptation, especially in the pagan culture surrounding the Corinthians. To avoid immorality, the apostle conceded that "each

man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband" (vs. 2). Notice the small word, "own". This clearly emphasizes the selflessness a marriage relationship requires. A husband and wife must acknowledge that their bodies are jointly-owned (verse 4). Married couples aren't to make decisions based on their individual desires and preferences. The act of sexual union is a gift God has

given to husband and wife to be used exclusively with and for each other. As such, Paul cautions couples not to deprive one another of this intimacy "except by mutual consent and for a time, so that [they] may devote [themselves] to prayer" (vs. 5). The words "mutual consent" and "for a time" show the limits to this agreement.

Paul then moves on to addressing "the unmarried and the widows" (vs. 8). His recommendation would be for them to stay single, as he was (Paul was

most likely a widower, since he'd been an active Pharisee). However, this would only be if they could control their sexual pas-

sions while remaining celibate. If not, they should marry (vs. 9). Any new marriage, however, should only be to a fellow Christian (1 Corinthians 7:39, 2 Corinthians 6:14-15).

So what about committed Christians (widowed, divorced or never-married) who long for a mate, but the Lord has not yet provided one? Perhaps these can be encouraged by Paul's words in verse 7 comparing marriage and sin-

gleness; he calls both options a "gift." He reminds those who are single that they have expanded freedoms to serve the Lord without the added responsibilities marriage rightly necessitates (vss. 32-35). Christ-followers can find contentment and purpose in an through Him, no matter their marital status (see Philippians 4:10-13).

There were also questions about staying with an unbelieving spouse. Paul's advice is two-fold and clear. If the believing spouse has left the unbelieving one, he or she should seek reconciliation, or stay unmarried (vss. 10-11). If the unbelieving spouse is willing to continue in the marriage relationship with the believing one, then this is to be pursued (vss. 12-13). The next few verses point out the potential influence the godly believer can have on the children and the unbelieving husband or wife. However, if the non-believer chooses to leave, Paul says, "A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances (vs. 15)".

Whether married, single, divorced or widowed, each church member has unique gifts as well as needs. As Christ's body, we're called to affirm and support our fellow believers, being "devoted to one another in brotherly love (Romans 12:10)".

*Maniscalco is a member of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Ocean Springs.*



### Explore the Bible

with Ann Maniscalco

## Our Banner • Exodus 17:8-16

We are always covered by God's protection.

"We stand better when we stand together." *"There's strength in numbers."* We generally agree with those statements, but sometimes life can feel so insurmountable that no amount of help or support makes a difference. Thankfully, God stands over the world, and He stands over every single issue we face. As the Israelites discovered, God is a banner over us, covering us with his protecting presence.

When you were younger, how often did you hold up your hand in class? Holding your hand up indicated that you wanted to respond to a question being asked, you had a comment to make, or you needed to excuse yourself to the restroom. In this passage, though, we see hands being held up for entirely different reasons.

This passage describes a military victory. Verse 8 tells of the Amalekites attacking the Israelites at Rephidim. The Amalekites were nomads in the desert south of Canaan. They were descendants of Esau through Eliphaz. They apparently were attempting to remove the Israelites this area and claim it as their own.

What is different about this attack of the Amalekites from the previous problems Moses has had to face? The Amalekites attacked Israel from the

rear, going after those that were the most worn out. Prior to this account, Israel had experienced a great miracle when water came from the rock (vv. 4-7). Often the devil attacks us after a spiritual high.

Enter Joshua. This is the first time we see him mentioned in scripture. Moses chose Joshua because of his military wisdom and potential strength in battle. Giving Joshua the authority to lead, he told Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand" (v. 9, NIV). Moses understood the power of the symbol of the rod. In historical warfare, the importance of displaying a "standard" or "banner" was huge. In our own awful Civil War, soldiers were taught to fight for the "colors," typically a regimental flag. And, of course, there is our own National Anthem, with its evocative picture of the star-spangled banner.

So Joshua had a chance to prove himself, and when Canaan was con-

quered forty years later it was obvious Moses had chosen the right man. Joshua's faith in God made him a great Israelite leader (Deut. 34:9).

Joshua attacked the Amalekites with fury. According to Warren Wiersbe, in his Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series), "Israel's great victory over Amalek involved three elements: the power of God in heaven, the skill of Joshua and the army on the battlefield, and the intercession of Moses, Aaron,

and Hur on the top of the hill. God could have sent angels to annihilate the enemy (Isa. 37:38), but He deigns to use human instruments to accomplish His purposes. Joshua and his army would trust God and fight, Moses and his associates would trust God and intercede, and God would do the rest. In this way, God's people would grow in faith and God's name would be glorified."

The soldiers fought the battle, but God determined the outcome. Many people raise their hands in praise to God, or in prayer. Here we see Mo-

ses lifting his hands toward God, as a petition to Him for victory. He did it in full sight of everyone. This was a call for perseverance and focus, much as soldiers in other battles in history would rally to a flag. It was symbolic of Israel's total dependence on the power of God.

Verse 11 is significant: "As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning" (NIV). What a picture of a lack of dependence! Moses was tired beyond reckoning and simply couldn't hold out. This wasn't necessarily evidence of a loss of physical strength, but waiting and depending on God can be hard work.

God provided Aaron and Hur for support. First they took a rock and gave it to Moses to serve as a seat. Then, standing on either side of him, they lifted his arms and held them aloft. His hands remained steady till sunset (v. 12). The Amalekites were defeated. Moses built an altar, naming it The Lord Is My Banner, in commemoration of the victory.

In your own life, what is the battle you are facing right now where you could use some support?

*Martin is Associate Editor of The Baptist Record.*

### Bible Studies for Life

with Tony Martin

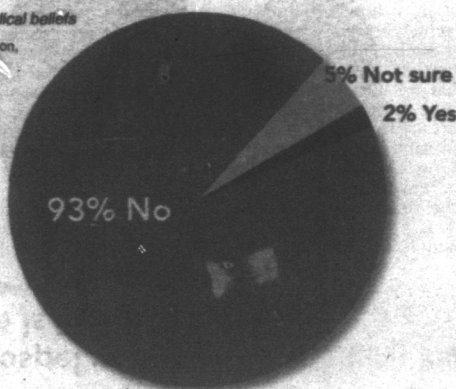


# LifeWay Research: Evangelicals strongly support Israel

## Are one or more of your parents or grandparents Jewish?

Among Americans with evangelical beliefs

When applied to the entire population, this response provides an estimate of 870,771 adult Americans who have evangelical beliefs and self-report that they have at least one Jewish parent or grandparent

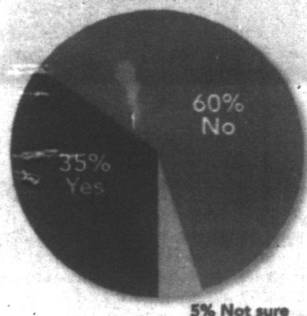


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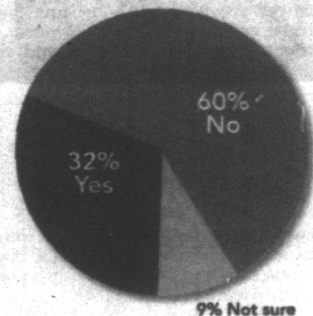
LifeWayResearch.com

Among Americans with evangelical beliefs who have Jewish friends

## In the last week have you prayed for the salvation of your Jewish friend(s)?



## In the last year have you shared the gospel with any of your Jewish friends?

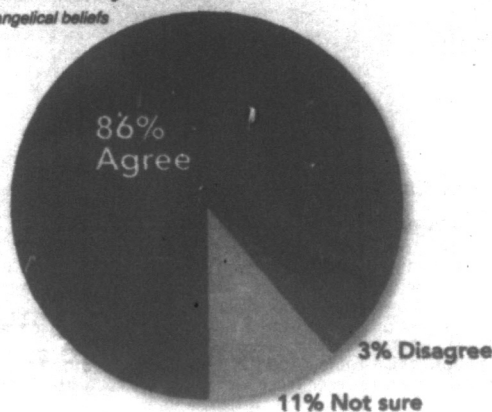


LifeWay Research

LifeWayResearch.com

## Sharing the gospel with Jewish people is important.

Among Americans with evangelical beliefs



LifeWay

LifeWayResearch.com

**NASHVILLE (BP and local reports)** — American evangelicals are known for their support of the nation of Israel, believing God promised to the Jewish people the land on which the country rests. A new study by LifeWay Research shows those Americans also have more personal motivations.

One in three has Jewish friends. Some have Jewish ethnicity; two percent of Americans with evangelical beliefs — an estimated 871,000 adult Americans — have a Jewish parent or grandparent.

"For some evangelicals, the Jewish community is family," says Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research, the Nashville-based evangelical research division of Southern Baptists' LifeWay Christian Resources that specializes in surveys about faith in culture and matters that affect churches.

LifeWay Research's findings are bolstered by an earlier study by Pew Research, which according to its web site is a division of Pew Charitable Trusts of Philadelphia, Pa., and "a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world. It conducts public opinion polling, demographic research, media content analysis and other empirical social science research. Pew Research Center does not take policy positions."

The 2013 Pew study found that about 1.6 million Americans who have a Jewish parent or were raised Jewish say they are Christians. The recent LifeWay Research study suggests that a sizable number of this group have evangelical beliefs.

The LifeWay Research study also found 30% of Americans with evangelical beliefs have Jewish friends and of those, 35% have prayed for their Jewish friend's salvation in the past week.

"Evangelicals say it's important to share their faith with their Jewish friends, but most evangelicals find this to be difficult for one reason or another," said McConnell.

Evangelicals who do share their faith with their Jewish friends may find a difficult audience. While many Americans are open to changing their faith, American Jews are more reluctant. Only a quarter of those who were raised Jewish no longer identify with that faith, according to the study from Pew Research.

By comparison, 34% of all Americans have changed their childhood faith group, according to Pew. That figure jumps to 42% after taking into account those who switch to a different Christian tradition.

Some Jewish people feel distant from evangelicals. When asked to rate how warmly they felt about other faiths, American Jews were lukewarm toward evangelicals and rated them only slightly above Muslims and below atheists, according to Pew Research.

Jews have warmer feelings about Catholics and mainline Protestants. Still, among Americans who identify as Jews, 34% say that someone can believe Jesus is the Messiah and still be considered Jewish, according to Pew Research.

## Uncertain relationships

Another complicating factor in the relations between evangelicals and Jews is that evangelicals seem unclear about the relationship between Jews and Christians and how Jews fit into God's plan, according to the LifeWay Research.

Twenty-eight percent embrace "supersessionism," or replacement theology — the idea that the Christian church has fulfilled or replaced the nation of Israel in God's plan. A greater percentage, 41%, re-

ject that argument while 32% are not sure.

Younger evangelical believers between 18-34 years of age are more likely to say Christians have replaced Jews in God's plan. Thirty-four percent agree, while 30% disagree. Thirty-six percent are not sure.

By contrast, 48% of evangelicals ages 65 and older disagree with replacement theology. Twenty-three percent agree, while 29% are not sure. Americans with evangelical beliefs also are uncertain whether many Jews will become believers in Jesus at some point in the future.

Fifty-five percent believe "the Bible teaches that one day, most or all Jewish people, alive at that time, will believe in Jesus." Sixteen percent disagree, and 29% are unsure.

While evangelicals see a clear tie between Bible prophecy and the rebirth of the nation of Israel, they're less certain whether Jewish people play a role in the return of Jesus.

Forty-seven percent agree with the statement, "Jewish people continue to be significant for the history of redemption as Jesus will return when the Jewish people accept Jesus." Twenty-three percent disagree, while 31% are not sure.

"Many evangelicals believe the Gospel will be spread to all people in the world before Jesus returns, but they aren't sure if Jewish people have a special place in God's plan anymore. This is especially true of young evangelicals," McConnell said.

## Methodology

LifeWay Research conducted the study on Sept. 20-28, 2017. The survey, underwritten by Chosen People Ministries and author Joel C. Rosenberg, was conducted using the web-enabled KnowledgePanel, a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. population.

Initially, participants are chosen scientifically by a random selection of telephone numbers and residential addresses. People in selected households are then invited by telephone or by mail to participate in the web-enabled KnowledgePanel. For those who agree to participate but do not already have Internet access, the market research company GfK provides at no cost a laptop and ISP connection.

Sample stratification and weights were used for gender by age, ethnicity, region, education, and household income to reflect the most recent U.S. Census data. The completed sample is 2,002 surveys. The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 2.7%. Margins of error are higher in subgroups.

Respondents were screened to include only adults with evangelical beliefs. Evangelical beliefs are defined using the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) LifeWay Research Evangelical Beliefs Research Definition based on respondent beliefs. Respondents are asked their level of agreement with four separate statements using a four-point, forced-choice scale (strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree). Respondents are categorized as having evangelical beliefs if they strongly agree with all four statements:

■ The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe.

■ It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.

■ Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin.

■ Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation.